

Prop. 84 funds up for grabs to improve watersheds

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Federally recognized tribes, nonprofit organizations and local, state and federal agencies in Tulare County can apply for a piece of \$5 million in grant money to participate in a wide variety of projects to improve watersheds in the Sierra Nevada mountains.

Elizabeth van Wagtendonk, a representative of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, which operates the grant program, presented the item July 27 to the Tulare County Board of Supervisors.

Van Wagtendonk said the money is part of \$10 million in Proposition 84 -- the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 -- bond funds.

The money has been unavailable as of late because of the state's ongoing budget crisis, but the funds are up for grabs once again, van Wagtendonk said.

"The Proposition 84 grant program is specifically to address watershed benefits and watershed health in the Sierra Nevada," she said.

There are two pots of money available: Category I and Category II funds.

Category I funds are available for acquisitions, easements and site improvements.

Preplanning work -- including California Environmental Quality Act and National Environmental Policy Act documentation -- must be completed if someone is applying for Category I money. An applicant may apply for up to \$1 million in Category I funds.

If relevant documentation has not been completed, a person may apply for up to \$250,000 in Category II funds.

Projects undertaken with Proposition 84 money will "improve, protect and restore natural resources in the watershed," Jim Branham, SNC's executive officer, said Friday.

"It's a pretty broad range of projects," he said.

The deadline to apply for the funds is Sept. 13.

Dating back to 2007, 13 projects in Tulare County totaling \$1.22 million have been undertaken with Prop. 84 funds.

The Sierra Nevada as a region has received just 2 percent of state and federal funding, van Wagtendonk said.

"This area is incredibly underserved," she said.

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